Cultural Integration and the Eating Habits of Hong Kong Immigrants in Canada

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By Lisa Neilson and Dr. Trevor Watts
Department of Consumer Studies
University of Guelph

The content of this report is the interpretation of the researchers and does not necessarily represent the opinion of the department or the government of Canada.

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☐ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to gain insight into the effects of cultural integration on the eating habits of immigrants and the implications for the Canadian food industry, based on the case of Hong Kong immigrants to Canada. The report is based on a qualitative exploratory study of the food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians, conducted in 1995 by a graduate student in the Department of Consumer Studies, at the University of Guelph. The findings of this research should assist the food industry to focus its marketing efforts to effectively meet the current and future demands of this growing segment of consumers.

Related research was analyzed from various fields and disciplines associated with consumer acculturation, new product (innovation) adoption, food preferences, and eating habits. Principles from these areas were used to define the objective of this study: to identify factors related to the adoption or rejection of so-called Western foods by Chinese immigrants in their integration into Canadian society.

Exploratory findings were gathered through five focus group interviews with a total of 26 Chinese Canadians of Hong Kong ancestry (both immigrants and Canadian-born Chinese) from the metropolitan Toronto area. Participants represented a range of years of residency, life stages and demographic characteristics, and were recruited through local community associations.

The study revealed 11 factors related to the retention of food traditions and those which influence the adoption of local food consumption patterns by Chinese Canadians: time, price, availability, willingness to try new foods, traditions, food qualities, information sources, market conditions, demographic variables, degree of acculturation, and the social context of food consumption. This report examines the interaction and effects of these factors and suggests certain marketing strategies for food processors and distributors.

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□ INTRODUCTION

Canada is, to a great extent, a country of immigrants. In 1992, annual immigration landings in Canada reached almost 253 000, their highest level since 1974 (Statistics Canada, 1994). Only seven years earlier annual immigration landings totalled 84 302 (Young, 1991). In 1994, Canada welcomed almost 218 000 new arrivals. Canada's three largest metropolitan areas (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) are the most popular areas of immigrant settlement. In fact, 38% of the population of Toronto are immigrants, defined as people who are not Canadian citizens by birth, excluding non-permanent residents (Statistics Canada, 1992).

Historically, immigrants to Canada have been predominantly from European countries. Canada was politically founded by the English and the French and immigrants from countries such as Germany, Italy, the Ukraine and the Scandinavian countries followed during the 1800s and 1900s. Recently however, immigration from Asian countries has increased significantly. Between 1984 and 1994 more than half of the immigrants to Canada came from Asian countries. The majority of Asian immigrants are of Chinese origin; of the 377 210 East Asian immigrants permanently residing in Canada in 1991, 41.7% were from mainland China, 40.4% from Hong Kong, and 4.7% from Taiwan (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 1993). The two provinces most heavily populated by Chinese in Canada are Ontario and British Columbia. The largest population of any single group of immigrants is the 80 390 Hong Kong Chinese living in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 1991).

The multicultural nature of Canada poses a challenge to marketers. Devising product strategies which best meet the wants and needs of Canadian consumers involves understanding the perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and behaviors of people from many different cultures. In addition, the composition of the Canadian population is ever-changing, making it even more difficult to adapt to marketplace conditions. Within the last decade, for instance, the Chinese community has become quite large (2.4% of the population) and is beginning to interest Canadian marketers. As potential consumers of Canadian products, it is important to gain as much insight as possible into the behavior of Chinese Canadians.

Problem Statement and Objectives

Presently, very little literature is available about the food consumption behavior of immigrants and minority ethnic groups in Canada. Food marketers need to understand the attitudes, perceptions, experiences and behaviors of these consumers in order to design effective product, promotion, pricing and distribution strategies. For example, as the Chinese Canadian community increases in size, those members of the food industry who are best able to satisfy the demands of these consumers will benefit.

In 1994, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada responded to the need for information on the food consumption behavior of selected ethnic groups by producing two reports: *Opportunities in*

Selected Ethnic Markets in Canada and *An Assessment of Selected Ethnic Food Markets in Canada.* The first report explored the food traditions and eating habits of several of the country's largest and fastest-growing ethnic groups. The second report examined the size and sources of supply for the Chinese, South Asian and Middle Eastern food markets.

Some key questions, however, remained unanswered which could shed light on the market potential of so-called ethnic foods. Firstly, when and how does an immigrant's eating habits change upon integrating into Canadian society? Secondly, which factors influence the retention of food traditions and which factors influence the adoption of local eating patterns? Finally, what effect do these changes have on the demand for so-called ethnic foods and what other implications are there for Canadian food processors and distributors?

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the eating habits of Chinese immigrants as they integrate into Canadian society and about the implications for food processors and distributors (e.g., how the market for "authentic" Chinese foods will be driven by recent immigrants). This information should help Canadian ethnic food processors and distributors better understand the food demands of recent immigrants to Canada and to develop products for these consumers.

This report was prepared for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada by Lisa Neilson and Dr. Trevor Watts of the Department of Consumer Studies, University of Guelph. It consists of a secondary analysis of information already collected as part of Ms Neilson's thesis, entitled *A Qualitative Exploratory Study of Food Consumption Behavior of Chinese Canadians* , which examined the adoption of Western-style foods by Chinese immigrants of Hong Kong descent. Specifically, the information was gathered through a comprehensive literature review, and a series of consumer focus groups with Chinese Canadians living in Toronto, whose origins were in Hong Kong.

This report applies the findings of the thesis research to the following topics: changes in food consumption behavior experienced by Chinese immigrants; implications of these changes on both the market for Chinese-style foods and the Canadian food industry in general; and marketing and retailing strategies which might prove effective at targeting these consumers with the products and services they demand.

☐ LITERATURE REVIEW

The study began with a comprehensive review of existing food consumption research, consumer acculturation research and innovation adoption theory as they relate to the eating habits of immigrant consumers. The literature review uncovered general information about the effects of cultural integration on eating habits, identified key information gaps and provided a framework to the consumer focus groups that followed. This chapter examines the factors which influence consumer acculturation, innovation adoption, cultural transmission, food consumption, preferences and aversions, and food traditions in China and Hong Kong.

Consumer Acculturation

Culture is a learned set of symbols, values, beliefs, and attitudes which are shared by a group of people (Axelson, 1986; Beckman et al. 1988; Curtis and Lambert, 1986; Wright et al., 1984). Because learning continues throughout one's lifetime, behavior is susceptible to change as individuals encounter new cultural situations. Immigrants undergo a process of learning called acculturation. Acculturation refers to the learning of the ways of a culture which is different from the one in which an individual has been raised (Dichter, 1964; Moschis, 1987). Similarly, Faber, et al. (1987, p.123) define acculturation as "the adoption of the dominant culture's beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors." The length of stay in a new country and the motivation that immigrants bring with them have been found to be positively related to the degree of acculturation (Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983), as have youthfulness and involvement in extracurricular activities and educational programs (Hertzler, et al., 1982).

While undergoing acculturation, new Canadians adopt various products and product usages which are common in Canadian culture. Penaloza (1994) uses the term consumer acculturation to describe the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country. It is generally assumed that acculturation progresses along a continuum, from the consumer's behavior in his or her country of origin to the behavior of the dominant culture in the country of residence (Faber, et al., 1987).

The relationship between the acculturation process and consumption behavior has been investigated by several researchers (Choe, et al., 1993; Grivetti and Paquette, 1978; Netland and Brownstein, 1984; Newman and Linke, 1982; Penaloza, 1994; Tan and Wheeler, 1983; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983; Yang and Fox, 1979). In their study of first-generation Chinese living in Nebraska, Yang and Fox (1979) found that the longer the Chinese had lived in the United States, the more changes in food habits had been made. Changes which occur tend to be in the direction of the habits of the dominant culture, but some aspect of the traditional dietary habits persist. For example, Tan and Wheeler (1983) found that Chinese families in London, England consumed English foods in such a way as to balance their expected effects, a practice which is characteristic of the Chinese system of health and disease. Likewise, in Penaloza's (1994) examination of the consumption

experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States it was found that many products and services associated with the U.S. consumer culture were adopted, yet other aspects of their consumption behavior (particularly with respect to food) were related to maintaining ties with Mexican culture.

Some unexpected deviations from the traditional acculturation model resulted, however, from Wallendorf and Reilly's study comparing food consumption of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Anglo Americans. Analysis of garbage composition showed that consumption patterns of Mexican Americans were unlike those either of their culture of origin or their culture of residence. The authors speculated that the Mexican Americans had adopted the behavior of Anglo-American stereotypes rather than their actual behavior.

Innovation Adoption

An innovation may be any idea or object which is perceived as new (Cateora and Hess, 1979; Hirschman, 1980; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). To immigrants then, many Western[1] food products and their common uses in Canada are innovations. New foods are often tried out of curiosity (Choe, et al., 1993), and may also be tried by immigrants in response to conflicts which are encountered during the acculturation process, such as the unavailability of products which were used in the country of origin. Additionally, problems may be resolved by using familiar products in new ways (Hirschman, 1980).

Resistance to an innovation may result when it risks creating considerable change, or when it conflicts with a consumer's belief structure (Ram and Sheth, 1989). Ram and Sheth (1989) discuss two categories of barriers to the adoption of innovations. Functional barriers relate to product usage patterns, product value, and risks associated with product usage. If the innovation is perceived to cause change in these areas, resistance will occur. Likewise, psychological barriers, such as product image and traditions and norms of consumers, which are perceived to be in conflict with consumer beliefs will discourage adoption.

An interesting case to consider is the resistance to change in flavor principles. Flavor principles are defined as culture-specific flavor combinations which are repetitively added to foods; e.g., soy sauce and ginger root are characteristic of Chinese foods (Rozin and Rozin, 1977).

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[1] The use of the term "Western foods" is intended to include those ingredients, flavor principles, preparation methods, and prepared food products which are characteristic of those consumed in North America and Europe. Examples given by participants include steak, pork chops, pizza, spaghetti, hamburgers and roast beef. The decision to use this term instead of "Canadian foods" was made as a result of pretesting with Hong Kong Chinese students who had difficulty understanding what was meant by "Canadian" foods. They themselves referred to "Western" foods when discussing their experiences with foods in Canada and from Canada.

> Their psychological importance is evidenced by the fact that emigrant groups characteristically continue to use their traditional flavorings, in spite of limited availability and high prices in their adopted countries. These flavorings are among the last remnants of the 'old culture' to disappear, if they do disappear, among the descendants of immigrants (Rozin and Rozin, 1977, p.246).

It seems that the psychological barriers involved with abandoning traditional flavor principles prevail over the negative functional consequences of keeping them. Kittler and Sucher (1989) suggest that changes in food consumption behavior are least likely to happen with foods which are characteristic of a particular culture or group, termed "core foods" because they are the staples which are regularly included in the diet. The foods which are more apt to be abandoned are "peripheral foods", which are eaten less frequently and are characteristic of individual food preference rather than group habits.

The adoption of new foods is more likely to occur when some motivation exists for changing existing food consumption behavior, e.g., an advantage offered by an innovation over use of an existing product. Possible advantages which may be provided to immigrants by Western foods are availability, ease of preparation, relatively low prices, and identification with other Canadians. In some cases, the sensory characteristics of Western foods may even be preferable to less popular traditional foods (e.g., desserts), thus providing an incentive to change (Kittler and Sucher, 1989). The more visible an innovation is to others, the more likely it is to be adopted (Hirschman, 1980). Cateora and Hess (1979) suggest that an innovation which is perceived to have maximum advantage, extreme compatibility, and easy-to-use is less susceptible to resistance.

Familiarity with the experiences of Chinese immigrants with Western food products and the Canadian marketplace will advance the understanding of why some Western foods are adopted while others are rejected within this segment.

Cultural Transmission

Adjustment to life in Canada involves the influence of various sources on the development of consumer behaviors. Mackie (1986) lists the following as major socialization agents: the family, peers, the school, and the mass media.

Generally, mass media communication channels are important in creating awareness, whereas interpersonal channels have a greater influence on attitudes (Rogers, 1971). Interpersonal communication between individuals who are similar in appearance, social status, beliefs, values, or education is the most effective form of communication in that it results in greater knowledge gain, attitude formation and change, and behavior change (Rogers, 1971). For this reason, it seems likely that fellow Chinese Canadians are more influential in the development of attitudes toward foods in Canada than are the mass media or members of other ethnic groups.

Interestingly, Robinson (1985, p.32) discusses food and food sharing as a means of cultural transmission:

> The use of taste, food, and food sharing may be an important vehicle for transmitting and learning specific cultural beliefs, and for promoting affiliation with members of the target culture.

Food is often used to initiate contacts with strangers and to stimulate social cohesion (Leininger, 1970). Most social situations involve eating and drinking, thus food is associated with friendship and a feeling of belonging to the group with whom one dines (Gifft, 1972). Food consumption behavior in this context has two implications for this research. Firstly, maintaining Chinese food practices allows Chinese immigrants to affiliate with other Chinese in Canada, thus preserving certain cultural customs. On the other hand, Chinese immigrants may integrate into Canadian society by adopting local food consumption behavior and by building friendships with members of other cultures by sharing meals.

Food Consumption Behavior

The bulk of the existing literature about the consumer behavior of immigrants focuses on the question of how an ethnic group's consumption behavior compares with the consumption behavior of the dominant culture group. Most of these studies have compared various ethnic groups with Anglos in the United States (Deshpande et al., 1986; George and Smith, 1993; Lee, 1993; Murray and Manrai, 1993; Netland and Brownstein, 1984; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). The few Canadian studies which have been reported focus on differences between French Canadians and English Canadians (Cheron and Muller, 1993; Hui et al., 1993; Muller, 1989; Schaninger et al., 1985). Although these two groups are important as the two largest, research efforts should not ignore other ethno-cultural communities in Canada, such as the Chinese population.

This research focuses on the question "What is the food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians in Canada?" Food consumption is defined by Axelson and Brinberg (1989) as the actual intake of food. This is affected by anything which may potentially prevent one from ingesting a food; for instance, food spoilage due to lack of preservation. For the purposes of this research however, the two factors which were considered to affect food consumption the most strongly were choices and purchases. Axelson and Brinberg (1989) state that choice reflects an individual's decision to purchase or consume a food, while purchase is the acquisition of food in exchange for resources.

In this study, the term food consumption behavior was understood to include food consumption, choice and purchase, as well as the factors which affect these behaviors. Some factors which commonly affect food consumption, choice, and purchase are who buys, what they buy, frequency of purchases, types of foods which are eaten, who eats what, the times and occasions

during which certain foods are consumed, the rules of etiquette, the symbolic meaning of food, and attitudes toward foods (Axelson and Brinberg, 1989; Cateora and Hess, 1979; Gofton, 1986).

Lewin (1943) has suggested that both cognitive and motivational factors must be considered when studying food consumption behavior. Cognitive factors are related to the question of how people think about food (Lewin, 1943; Rappoport, et al., 1992); these factors include attitudes and preferences, meal patterns (e.g., the foods that comprise a supper) and cultural availability (i.e., foods which are thought of as edible materials by a given culture). The following illustrates the concept of cultural availability:

> We [Westerners] do not understand the Chinese, who bury ducks' eggs in the ground, so that they start to ferment, just as the Chinese cannot understand us, when we eat cheese, which they regard as bad milk (Koestlin, 1977).

The word motive on the other hand, is what induces a person to act (Fowler and Fowler, 1964). Motivational factors include values, physical and social food needs, and obstacles to be overcome in buying and preparing food (Lewin, 1943). Tofu is discussed by Ram and Sheth (1989) as a food product which has faced resistance in North America because the cooking skills required for using tofu are relatively time consuming and complicated by North American food preparation standards. This example shows the importance of motivational factors in the food buying process.

Similarly, Cassidy (1981) has further categorized factors which have been shown to be related to food choice as follows: biologic factors (age, gender, temperature, lactase deficiency); sociologic factors (ethnicity, religion, education); household familial factors (purchasing power, food sharing behavior); and cognitive factors (body image, healthful foods, taboo foods).

Food Preferences and Aversions

Perhaps more obvious factors which affect food choice are preference for and aversion to qualities inherent in foods. Food preferences are defined by Logue (1986) as the food selections that people and animals make when all foods are equally and simultaneously available. A preference for a food in a free-choice situation is often an indication of liking (Rozin and Rozin, 1977). The two terms "preference" and "liking" are not necessarily synonymous however; for instance, one may like both bananas and carrots, but bananas may be preferred by a consumer with dental problems because they are easier to chew.

Food preferences may develop when foods are consumed in a positive social context. Logue (1986) gives the following example to illustrate this point: if an adult repeatedly gives a child a food while being very friendly to the child, the child's preference for the food will increase. If the social context in which food is eaten is related to food preferences, and if food preferences affect food

choice, then it follows that social experiences associated with various foods should be considered when exploring the food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians.

Murcott (1986) observed that food avoidances pertaining to foods of animal origin, especially flesh, are accompanied by the most severe sanctions, engender the strongest reaction and are most frequently incorporated into religious observance. In China, beef is avoided by many because cattle are considered to be work animals, rather than a source of food (Hook, 1991). Dairy products are also commonly avoided, both because soybean-based products offer a cheaper alternative to dairy foods and because there is a high incidence of lactose intolerance in people of Chinese descent (Hook, 1991).

When discussing food preferences and aversions, the word familiarity is commonly used in terms of one's exposure to foods (Logue, 1986; Stang and Crandall, 1977). If one has been exposed to a food, either directly or indirectly (through media or the experiences of personal acquaintances), the food is said to be familiar. As the frequency of exposure increases, so does the degree of familiarity. Foods to which a person has not been exposed are innovations according to the definition being used in this study. In food psychology literature however, these foods are referred to as "novel". In this report "unfamiliar", "innovation", and "novel" are used synonymously in the context of understanding cultural integration and the eating habits of Hong Kong Chinese in Canada.

Generally, people prefer familiar foods over innovative foods. Birch (1981) reports that the preferences of humans for novel stimuli are enhanced through repeated exposure to the stimuli. A familiar food can provide emotional security and may be associated with pleasant or comforting memories (Gifft, 1972). In some cases though, innovative foods are preferred. As something becomes more familiar it may be viewed less favorably if the context in which exposure occurs is negative, if use of the food is complex, or if the food was not strongly liked initially (Stang and Crandall, 1977). Of course boredom may also lead to a preference for new foods over familiar foods.

There has been a controversial suggestion that the preference for novel foods may actually be positively related to a "personality trait which predisposes some people toward novelty or sensation seeking" (Otis, 1984, p.739). Conclusive evidence has not been found to support this idea. Otis (1984, p.744) contends that "willingness to taste unusual foods is best predicted by specific attitudes about food and is largely unrelated to preferences for engaging in other kinds of novel or risky activities." If this is true, the attitudes of immigrants toward Western foods may be related to their willingness to try Canadian foods.

Cardello et al. (1985) found that a consumer's liking of a product is greatest when his or her actual experience with the product is consistent with expectations of the product. In identifying factors which influence food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians it was therefore important to explore expectations of Western foods, as well as the role of socialization agents such as

neighbors, friends, co-workers and family members (Goodwin, 1992) as a source of these expectations.

Chinese Food Traditions

The role of tradition is particularly noteworthy when discussing food consumption behavior and the willingness to try unfamiliar foods, as it is often strongly linked with eating habits (Ram and Sheth, 1989). In fact, Leininger (1970) goes so far as to suggest that cultural values may be the most significant factor influencing differences in food practices.

The aim of the traditional Chinese approach to food is to maintain a state of balance in the body between "hot" and "cold". The basic principle of this approach is that illnesses and foods are classified this way. Good health may be maintained by choosing a balance of hot and cold foods, while poor health may be treated with foods or medicines which appropriately counterbalance the illness; e.g., a person with a "cold" disease will be treated with a "hot" food (Wheeler and Tan, 1983).

According to Barer-Stein (1979), 98% of the Chinese diet has traditionally been of plant origin. Pork, lamb, mutton, poultry, fish and seafood are generally well-liked; unfortunately they are relatively expensive in China. Meats are customarily consumed in bite-size or thin strips to cook quickly and are used to spread flavor to other ingredients. Fish and seafood are often dried and fresh fish is sometimes marinated to alter the taste and smell.

Rice is the staple grain in the south of China, while wheat in the form of noodles and breads or pastries is more common in the north. A common Chinese breakfast is congee, a thick rice gruel eaten with pickles or preserves. As well, soybeans are important in the Chinese diet. They are the source of foods such as tofu, soy sauce and soybean milk.

Sweets are not as popular in China as they are in Western countries. Fruits commonly serve as desserts, while tea is taken clear.

Chinese cuisine varies according to geographic region. In Peking (north) steaming and poaching are common cooking methods. Wheat flour is used more than rice, and lamb and mutton are the most abundant sources of meat. Onions, garlic and leeks are used frequently for flavoring.

To the south, in the Cantonese and Fukienese regions, stir frying and steaming are the cooking methods of choice. Rice is the staple and, because of this area's proximity to the Pacific Ocean, fish and seafood are often consumed. Furthermore, this area was the location of the first port in China, resulting in the introduction of Western foods such as tomatoes, peanuts, corn, and French pastries by traders and immigrants. Cantonese cooking is characterized by its relatively sweet flavor, as sugar is often used as a seasoning.

Szechwan cuisine, from central and western China, features hot peppers and spicy flavors. Whereas vegetable-based oils are used for cooking in the rest of the country, this area frequently uses chicken fat for stir frying vegetables.

Food Traditions in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a British colony located on the coast of the South China Sea. Acquired from China by the British in 1843 as a result of the Opium Wars, Hong Kong's sovereignty will be restored to China in 1997 (Lo, 1992). About 97% of Hong Kong's population is Chinese with ancestors originating mainly from Guangdong, a Chinese province which borders Hong Kong. As of 1991, 59.8% of Hong Kong's population was born in Hong Kong, 35.6% in China, and 4.6% elsewhere (Lo, 1992).

From its geographic location and the high proportion of Chinese originating from the southeast, the food traditions of the Hong Kong Chinese resemble those of the Cantonese region of China (Girling, 1989). Rice is so important to the Hong Kong Chinese diet that meals are often defined by the presence or absence of rice. Soup is another item which is central to the Hong Kong Chinese meal (Cooper, 1986). Hong Kong is one of the most westernized cities in the Orient (Lo, 1992) and this fact may be reflected in the food consumption behavior of the Hong Kong Chinese.

□ RESEARCH METHODS: FOCUS GROUPS WITH HONG KONG IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA

This study was conducted using qualitative research methods. When relevant variables have yet to be identified, as in this case, it is difficult to anticipate which issues should be measured (Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Morgan, 1988). A qualitative approach is appropriate for exploratory research such as this because its flexibility allows ideas and categories to emerge and change as the project progresses (McCracken, 1988).

The data for this research were collected using focus group discussions with Chinese Canadian consumers. The focus groups were be led by the researcher, a Canadian of European descent. Because of the difference in cultural backgrounds between the focus group participants and the moderator, the data collection process had to provide enough flexibility for the researcher and study subjects to arrive at mutually understood questions and answers. Open-ended questions with insightful responses are characteristic of qualitative research (McCracken, 1988), providing the necessary flexibility for this situation.

Methodological Approach

Because the purpose of this study was to identify factors which are relevant to the eating habits of Chinese Canadians, qualitative methods were more suitable (Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Morgan, 1988; Snell, 1987) than quantitative research, which relies on a limited predetermined range of responses (Carey, 1993). Without having first conducted exploratory, qualitative research, these responses might not have been accurately anticipated.

The method of data collection used was the focus group interview, which relies on interaction within a small group to produce insights that would be less accessible through interviews with individual participants (Cook, 1981). The conversation of focus groups is based on topics that are supplied by the researcher, who typically takes the role of a moderator. Ideally, the moderator's involvement in the discussion is minimal, allowing the main issues to flow from the participants themselves (Morgan, 1988) through the use of open-ended and non-biasing questions (Debus, 1989).

The group discussions were recorded and transcribed, with the transcripts becoming the fundamental data to be analyzed (Cook, 1981). The verbal, self-reported nature of focus group data provided two key benefits for this study: 1) the opportunity to clarify culturally specific terms, which could have been misinterpreted through other data collection methods, and 2) the perspective of food consumption from the participants, in their own terminology. It is important to note that the results of focus group research are not generalizable without being followed-up with quantitative research involving larger study samples (Calder, 1977; Carey, 1993; Percy, 1981).

Study Sample

The sample from which the focus group participants were recruited consisted of Hong Kong Chinese who have settled in the metro Toronto area. Chui and Pang (1994) report that the Chinese population in Toronto is greater than 300 000, with a recent growth in popularity of the suburbs for settlement; for example, from 1993 to 1994, the Chinese community in Richmond Hill more than doubled. The large number of Chinese living in this area indicates that this group is not only accessible but also interesting to marketers as a subgroup of the increasing Chinese population in Canada.

Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong in particular were also chosen because of regional variations in Chinese food traditions. It was believed that restricting the sample to a homogeneous culture group from a relatively small geographic area such as Hong Kong would simplify the identification of variables influencing consumption behavior. Differences in the food consumption behaviors of immigrants from the other regions of China could be the topic of future studies.

Recruitment of Focus Group Participants

To give a varied perspective of the experiences of Hong Kong immigrants in Toronto, groups were arranged to include a range of ages, occupations, lengths of time in Canada, and household compositions (Appendix 1). As well, both males and females participated. The specific variables used for arranging each group were age (20 to 40 years, and over 40 years of age), and length of time in Canada (less than five years, more than five years, and born in Canada). These criteria were chosen to provide enough homogeneity within each group to allow effective group interaction (Cook, 1981), but with enough diversity of experience to cover the range of the topic area (Lautman, 1981).

The period of five years since immigration was chosen as the division between groups because Newman and Linke (1982) found significant differences in food habits between groups of Chinese Americans who had immigrated to the United States within five years and beyond five years. This benchmark of five years was also used in Hong Kong to classify immigrants as either "early" or "recent" by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department in their 1986 census (Ngo, 1994). By making a comparison based on length of time in Canada, it was hoped that patterns of change in food consumption behavior over time could be noticed and perhaps linked to the acculturation process.

To allow full participation in the discussions, focus group participants were required to understand and to speak English, as this was the language in which the focus group discussions were conducted. In addition, because many of the focus group topics (Appendix 2) pertained to food buying behavior, each participant was required to be involved with some aspect of the food purchasing and food preparation for his or her household.

It is usually easiest to gain entry to a study population through the gatekeepers in an organization (Marshall and Rossman, 1989), therefore community organizations serving the Chinese community in Toronto were approached for participants. Recruiting participants proved to be the greatest challenge of this research project. The recruiting process took place over a period of four months, and required contacting more than 50 sources. Initial contact with each organization was made by telephone and, as necessary, followed up with a letter of explanation and another phone call.

Based on the first recruitment contacts, it was decided to offer a $25 incentive to each participant. This payment did not appear to attract only participants in need of extra money, as those who ultimately agreed to participate represented a wide range of socioeconomic groups.

The method of recruiting participants for this study is known as snowballing. With snowballing, initial contacts are made and these contacts provide references for further contacts, and so on. Recognized as being appropriate for reaching small, specialized populations (Aaker and Day, 1980), snowballing proved essential for generating enough cooperation to carry out this research. A disadvantage of this method in this case was that it was difficult to be very selective in choosing participants. In each of two groups one participant did not fall into the same category of length of time in Canada; in neither case did this sway the direction of the discussion inappropriately.

Of the more than 50 initial contacts made, five focus groups ensued. The following reasons for unsuccessful contacts are given:

1. Many of the community organizations serve very recent immigrants who do not speak English.
2. Memberships of several of the organizations contacted were predominantly from origins outside of Hong Kong.
3. The nature of the request for participation was not consistent with the policies of the organizations.
4. There was a lack of interest in participating in the research.
5. Of those who showed an interest in participating, some were unable to meet at the arranged time and place.

Recruitment of a balanced sample of various ages and lengths of time in Canada was challenged by the nature of Chinese immigration to Canada. Because the principal period of immigration from Hong Kong to Canada has been the past 10 years, the number of Canadian-born Chinese adults with parents who immigrated from Hong Kong is relatively small. Consequently, attempts to include a group of Canadian-born Chinese over the age of 40 in this study were unsuccessful. A similar problem occurred with those under the age of 40, but three participants were eventually recruited to give some representation of the Canadian-born Chinese.

Recruiting participants from community organizations implied that many of the participants were acquaintances. Although focus groups are generally more productive when the participants are strangers, groups may be composed of friends with relatively little impact on focus group results (Fern, 1981; Nelson and Frontczak, 1988). The benefit of recruiting through organizations was greater than the cost of using participants who were not acquainted with each other prior to their involvement in the study.

The number of participants recruited for a focus group is usually between five and ten (Calder, 1977; Debus, 1989; Morgan, 1988). Lautman (1981) suggests that small groups may be used when the topic under discussion is interesting and/or technical. Because food is known to be an important element of Chinese culture, it was assumed that food consumption behavior would be an interesting topic to the study group. Based on this, the decision was made to recruit six participants for each group, which provided enough variety in experiences to effectively cover the discussion topics.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group interviews were held between February and April, 1995. The specific times and places for the focus group discussions were arranged by the community organization contacts who had recruited the participants. Each interview lasted between one hour and fifteen minutes and one hour and forty-five minutes. Topics discussed by the focus groups were drawn from the following questions which emerged from the literature review:

1. What are some of the barriers and motivations which Chinese Canadians have found to be involved with the use of Western foods?
2. What is the nature and extent of influence on the adoption of Western foods by each of the socialization agents?
3. How is food involved in maintaining social ties with the Chinese community and in creating social ties with other Canadians?
4. What are the food preferences of Chinese Canadians, and how have these preferences been developed?
5. What expectations and attitudes do Chinese Canadians hold toward Western foods?

Based on three depth interviews with individual Chinese students at the University of Guelph during the initial stages of this research, the five questions listed were summarized into three general research questions around which the focus group discussion outline (Appendix 2) was designed:

1. Why do these consumers buy food where they do?
2. Why do these consumers buy the food they do?

3. How do cultural influences affect the food consumption behavior of this group of consumers?

The discussion outline was then pretested using two focus groups (Appendix 3) consisting of University of Guelph students who had left Hong Kong between one and six years ago. One student was Canadian-born, with parents having immigrated from Hong Kong. These students were recruited through two clubs for Chinese students on campus: the Chinese Students' Society and the Chinese Christian Fellowship Club.

The pretesting process reinforced the decision to recruit relatively small numbers of participants for each group, as one of the pretests involved a group of 11 people. This group was not only difficult to control, but the bulk of the conversation came from only five or six participants while the others did not participate and talked among themselves. More equal distribution of the conversation ensued with the other group, which included only five participants.

Pretesting also prompted the use of the word "Western" in place of "Canadian" food. Confusion resulted when the participants were asked to discuss Canadian foods and, because the participants themselves referred to foods typically eaten in Canada as "Western", it seemed logical to simply talk about Western foods. A definition of the word "Western" was added to the discussion outline to further ensure a mutual understanding of the term.

Finally, questions which failed to stimulate insightful conversation were made more specific to ensure that all topic areas were adequately covered. These questions were explored both in terms of products and distribution. Focus group topics related to products included the usage of various brands, staple ingredients, prepared foods, and forms of preservation (dried, frozen, canned, pickled, salted). There was discussion of distribution in terms of patronage of Chinese grocery stores, Canadian supermarkets, farmers' markets, convenience stores, and restaurants.

Role of the Chinese Canadian Assistant

A female Chinese Canadian graduate student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Guelph was hired as an assistant for this research. She was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to Canada with her family at the age of four. The role of this assistant was two-fold: firstly, she served as a translator during the focus group discussions; and secondly, she helped bridge the cultural gap between the researcher and participants in the analysis of the data.

The assistant did not actively participate in the interview process, but served as a resource in the few instances that required translation from Cantonese to English. All of these translations were for foods (e.g., peanut butter, ginseng, and names of various seafood). Participants were not distracted by her presence.

During the data analysis, the assistant reviewed the transcripts and the analysis for obvious cultural misinterpretations. Munroe and Munroe (1986) explain that assistance from a member of the culture group under study provides insight from the perspective of one who shares a common language and socio-cultural system with the participants. This perspective was an instrumental element of the analysis of this data.

For consistency, the presence of the assistant at all five of the discussions would have been ideal; however, she was unable to attend the Canadian-born Chinese focus group interview. Her absence was not a significant issue in this case because no translation was necessary and the review of transcripts and analysis of this interview revealed no apparent misinterpretations.

Analytical Methods

Transcription of the taped interviews was done by the researcher to provide a foundation for in-depth analysis of the data. Lost data resulted when soft voices were inaudible on the tape, when speakers interrupted each other, and when parts of the conversations lapsed into Cantonese. Missing data were indicated as such in the transcripts, rather than guessing the intent of the content. In most cases the context of the conversation was retained.

Analysis of the focus group data began with a line-by-line review of the transcribed discussions to give labels to key ideas being brought out by each sentence or paragraph. The key ideas which had occurred with strength and frequency (Snell, 1987) were then organized into central themes. Relationships between themes were sought in terms of their similarity and/or opposition, and the raw data (transcripts) were again consulted to verify these relationships and to identify instances in which the relationships did not apply.

The subjective nature of qualitative research (Calder, 1977) leaves the interpretation of focus group data susceptible to bias. These data consist of words, which often have multiple meanings (Miles and Huberman, 1984), making objective analysis more difficult than in a quantitative study. The potential to misinterpret the intended meanings behind qualitative verbal data was greater with this study because of the difference in cultural backgrounds between the researcher and the participants. The input of the Chinese assistant was instrumental in minimizing this risk.

On the other hand, there is an advantage to working with another culture. McCracken (1988) states that in this situation the researcher takes nothing for granted so there are no assumptions to overshadow the data collection or analysis. Although cultural differences increase the risk of researcher bias in one sense, the risk is decreased in another. It is hoped that insight from two cultural perspectives — one similar to and one different from the culture-group under study — has resulted in a true interpretation of the data.

Limitations

Aside from usual limitations associated with qualitative research, such as its lack of generalizability and its subjective nature, there was the potential for misunderstanding because the researcher was not Chinese. To minimize the likelihood of misunderstanding between the focus group participants and the moderator, the discussion guide was revised through pretesting and the Chinese Canadian assistant was involved in the both the data collection and analysis.

Another consideration is the bias which may have resulted from the sample studied. Those who agreed to participate were confident in their English-speaking abilities and, consequently, may have been more familiar with Western foods and consumption behaviors. Moreover, Yu states (1987, p.25) "language is the most important aspect of culture and is the chief vehicle of learning other aspects of culture." The implication is that this study sample may be better equipped to adopt the food consumption behavior of Canadians than non-English-speaking Chinese Canadians. If this is true of the study sample, this research could over estimate the true acceptance of Western foods by Chinese Canadians.

Furthermore, given that Hong Kong is a British colony this sample of Hong Kong Chinese has likely had more experience with Western foods prior to entering Canada than Chinese immigrants originating from other areas of the Pacific Rim.

☐ DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Eleven principal factors (Table 1) emerged from the focus group discussions as being related to food consumption behavior of the Hong Kong immigrants to Canada. None of these factors act in isolation; therefore, they will be discussed in the context of the research questions around which this study was designed rather than as 11 separate topics. The aim of this discussion is to further understand the changes experienced by Chinese immigrants as they integrate into Canadian society.

Table 1 Factors related to food consumption behavior

1. **Time** (shopping/food preparation)
   - willingness to spend
   - requirement to spend
2. **Price**
   - store/restaurant decisions
   - product decisions
3. **Availability** (selection/substitution)
   - preferred food/brand
   - preferred store
   - alternative food/brand
   - alternative store
4. **Willingness to try**
   - traditions
   - curiosity/boredom
   - low price
   - social context
   - preferences
   - expectations
   - attractive packaging
5. **Food traditions**
   - flavor principles
   - preparation methods
   - food/body relationship
   - household roles
   - core/peripheral foods
6. **Food qualities**
   - freshness
   - sensory considerations (texture, taste, smell)
7. **Information sources**
   - word-of-mouth
   - trial and error
   - newspapers/flyers
   - observations/experiences
8. **Market conditions**
   - immigration patterns
   - health attitudes
   - price sensitivity
   - positioning of Chinese food
9. **Demographic variables**
   - age
   - household composition
   - employment status
   - disposable income
10. **Degree of acculturation**
    - age
    - community involvement
    - length of time in Canada
    - expectancies of change
    - socialization agents
11. **Social context**
    - number of people
    - age of people
    - relationship of people

Food preferences of Chinese Canadians reflect both cultural traditions and Canadian market trends. On the basis of sensory food characteristics, traditional Chinese foods are generally preferred over all others. Other factors identified by this research, however, may also govern food consumption behavior. Depending on one's demographic traits, preferences may be based more on money-saving or time-saving characteristics. These findings also indicate that there is a general preference for variety in the diet, related to the willingness of most of the participants to try new foods and to Chinese food traditions.

An overwhelming preference for fresh ingredients over canned or frozen foods was consistently reported by the participants of this research. The perception of high turnover as an indication of freshness was also important. The preference for freshness may have evolved from the shopping style in Hong Kong. Due to the hot, humid climate and limited storage space in relatively smaller dwellings in Hong Kong, food shopping tends to be done daily. Because there is generally no need for storage or preservation, meat, seafood, and produce are always purchased extremely fresh, and even live in some cases (e.g., fish and chicken). In Canada, examples of the influence of these preferences may be seen in the frustration expressed by the participants with trying to find affordable live fish, and in the tendency to choose stores based on the freshness of the merchandise. Bread and dairy products, for instance, are generally purchased in Western supermarkets because of their perceived high turnover rate, while many fruits and vegetables are purchased in Chinese stores for the same reason.

The preferences discussed by the participants in this research seemed to shift away from traditional Chinese foods toward Western foods and other ethnic styles with increasing length of

residence in Canada. This shift was more noticeable for immigrants who had been in Canada for more than 15 years and for the Canadian-born Chinese.

Expectations and Attitudes Toward Western Foods

The immigrants interviewed for this research explained that many of their expectations of foods in Canada were formed from experiences with Western foods served in restaurants in Hong Kong. Many expected when they got to Canada that the food would be bland and heavy, and would consist largely of beef, potatoes, bread, pasta, and dairy products. Hamburgers, spaghetti, steak, and french fries were the most frequently cited examples of Western foods which have been incorporated into their regular diets in Canada. This suggests that their behavior is somewhat consistent with their expectations before immigrating.

Further support for the consistency between expectations and behavior is that more recent immigrants had heard before leaving Hong Kong that many Chinese foods are readily available in Canada and they therefore did not expect to change their food consumption behavior upon arriving in Canada. Conversely, those who had arrived in Toronto 15 or 20 years ago, before its Chinese community was the size it is now expected to change their behavior substantially. Expectations of change appear to be based on awareness of the nature of the Canadian marketplace as described by friends and relatives who had moved to or visited Canada. It may be that consumers belonging to smaller immigrant communities in Canada would expect to change their eating habits more, as foods unique to their cultures may be less readily available. This link between expectations and behavior is only one explanation for the differences in behavior between early and recent immigrants however, as this difference is also likely a result of the degree of acculturation.

Favorable attitudes toward Canadian consumption behavior and Western foods tend to be based on convenience and price. Sandwiches, hamburgers, spaghetti and steak were all discussed as being fast and easy to prepare and to eat. Additionally, cooking methods which are more common in Canada than in Hong Kong, such as baking, require less attention than more traditional Chinese cooking methods. Foods which are too easy to prepare (ready-to-eat) though may be associated with laziness by more traditional Chinese people; food preparation is generally viewed as an important activity.

References were made several times to certain foods being more or less expensive than they had been in Hong Kong. Prices of Western foods in Canada are reportedly lower than in Hong Kong; these comparatively lower prices were related to positive attitudes. Attitudes could potentially vary across other immigrant groups depending on prices in Canada relative to prices in their countries of origin.

Finally, the variety of food in Canada, particularly variety in ethnic foods, was generally very well-liked. Most participants had not expected to find foods from so many ethnic groups available, and they seemed to enjoy trying various cuisines in restaurants with friends. Although all groups discussed this topic to some extent, the enjoyment of other ethnic foods appeared to be stronger with those who had lived in Canada the longest.

The Link Between Food and Social Ties

Clear patterns related to social aspects of food consumption emerged from the focus group discussions. Social influences on food consumption behavior act in opposite directions on the continuum between Chinese consumption behavior and Western consumption behavior. In general, non-Chinese food is eaten more often in non-Chinese company; for instance, when eating lunch with co-workers. Chinese food tends to be eaten in Chinese company, especially during weekend family gatherings in restaurants and at home when eating meals with the whole family. Older relatives in particular appear to influence food consumption behavior of the entire family to retain Chinese food traditions. The trial of new foods and the adoption of Western behaviors occur primarily in the presence of non-Chinese peers, co-workers and friends. Presumably these behaviors are associated with maintaining social cohesion with the Chinese and creating social ties with other Canadians.

The number of people involved in the meal occasion is also related to consumption decisions. When eating alone or in small groups, there is a tendency to eat Western foods, many of which are perceived as requiring less time and effort to prepare than Chinese foods. Eating in restaurants and/or eating Chinese-style foods seems to be preferred in situations involving larger groups. There are two reasons for this: cooking at home for large groups requires too much time and effort; and Chinese style meals involve the sharing of many dishes among everyone at the table. The variety which results from this practice is greater with larger groups of people. The implication for restaurateurs is therefore the potential to attract this group of consumers by offering menu options designed for sharing a variety of dishes among groups of four or more.

The consumption of ethnic foods which are neither Chinese nor Western (e.g., Indian, Thai, Japanese) appears to fall outside of the traditional acculturation continuum. The consumption of such cuisines follows no noticeable pattern, according to the findings of this research. The consumption of ethnic foods with the study sample may be a function of the popularity of ethnic foods in North American society or a function of Chinese food traditions, which are characterized by variety, and a general willingness to try new foods.

The Influence of Socialization Agents on the Adoption of Western Foods

The adoption of Western foods is related to the influences of various socialization agents, such as family members, the education system, mass media and co-workers. Social influences may encourage or discourage the adoption of Western foods. Seniors are generally less likely to adopt Western food consumption behaviors (e.g., the use of ovens, the purchase of ready-to-eat foods, and the consumption of dairy products and sweets). Canadians of non-Chinese ethnic backgrounds may encourage the adoption of Western foods through social gatherings such as potluck suppers, restaurants and meals eaten at work or at school. Social contacts are also important in exposing Chinese Canadians to Western foods which have never been tried.

The role of mass media in the adoption of Western foods is primarily to create awareness of the existence of various food products, and to provide information. Advertisements are generally viewed suspiciously, but newspaper flyers are used regularly to check prices. In-store samples of products are useful in promoting the trial of novel foods.

Attitudes toward Western foods are formed more through personal experience and word-of-mouth than through the messages of the media. Overall, socialization agents may be secondary to personal experiences in influencing the adoption of Western foods, as the Chinese Canadians interviewed for this study were quite willing to try new foods, and based their opinions and subsequent purchase decisions on their own experiences.

Barriers and Motivations to the Use of Western Foods

Several factors were found to motivate the retention of Chinese food habits over the use of Western foods by this study sample. Perhaps the strongest factor affecting the use of Western foods is Chinese food traditions. Foods whose qualities conflict with the sensory characteristics of traditional Chinese foods are generally tried more reluctantly. Western desserts are perceived to be too sweet and too rich, the fish and seafood in Western restaurants are generally perceived as overcooked, and canned soup was described as being too starchy. Salads in Canada are usually made of raw vegetables while Chinese salads usually consist of cooked vegetables and canned fruit. Furthermore, the perceived freshness of some Western foods was reported to be much lower than foods which were consumed in Hong Kong, especially seafood.

The traditional view of household duties includes meal preparation. This seems to inhibit, to a certain extent, regular consumption of ready-to-eat or convenience foods, particularly by older consumers and those who have been in Canada for less time. All participants who discussed this topic however, seemed careful to justify their use of these foods suggesting that the avoidance of food preparation may induce feelings of guilt.

Social barriers to the use of Western foods exist in situations which include older Chinese relatives, or large numbers of people (four or more) at a meal. Chinese-style cooking methods are perceived to be more time consuming than Western-style preparation, but well worth the effort when many people will share the meal.

Health issues may deter Chinese Canadians from consuming some Western foods. Milk products are avoided by some people who are lactose intolerant, and the overall awareness of the effects of foods on the body limit the consumption of Western foods which are high in fat and sodium.

Older Chinese Canadians seem to prefer traditional meals and are more resistant to Western foods than the young. It is possible that this is a consequence of moving to Canada at an age at

which they had already developed food consumption behaviors in Hong Kong. These people would be more resistant to change than younger immigrants whose consumption behaviors are less ingrained.

Finally, current market conditions in Toronto, namely the relatively great availability of Chinese foods, means that Western foods are consumed out of choice rather than necessity. Furthermore, there appears to have been little expectation to change food consumption by recent immigrants, since they were aware that many Chinese foods were available in Toronto before immigrating. The findings of this research suggest that these expectations are related to a slower acculturation process and, therefore, less change in behavior.

Characteristics of Western foods which were found to be consumed by the study sample were such that the foods offered some motivation for their use over more traditional Chinese foods. Of course, most Western foods are more readily available than Chinese foods and therefore require less time and effort to purchase. In addition, the Western foods which have been the most readily adopted by the participants are fast and easy to prepare, compared with some Chinese foods. Examples of foods which were specifically discussed in terms of ease of preparation and consumption are sandwiches, steak, oven-roasted chicken, spaghetti, and frozen pizza. Western foods are more likely to be chosen for breakfast and lunch which are eaten alone more often than supper.

Price is also an important consideration when making consumption decisions. Low prices may induce the trial of some Western foods and may allow a Western product to be chosen over a similar Chinese product.

Health issues may also promote the use of some Western foods. The most commonly discussed example of this point was the use of milk to prevent osteoporosis.

Produce which is grown locally is desirable because of its perceived freshness. Many fruits and vegetables were found to be desirable during the summer and at farmers' markets where sold by local producers. Freshness was commonly related to perceived retail turnover by participants in their explanation of store choices. Typical Western foods such as baked goods and dairy products were consistently given as examples of foods purchased in supermarkets, while more traditional Chinese foods such as dried bean curd, Chinese mushrooms, and Chinese greens were purchased in Chinese stores. Produce and meats seem to be purchased wherever they are perceived to be the freshest and the cheapest, regardless of whether the store is Chinese or Western.

Certain social influences also motivate the consumption of Western foods. Instructions regarding the preparation and use of Western foods are often provided by personal contacts, thus facilitating the consumption of these foods. Trial often occurs in public situations, when social acceptance may be achieved by consuming Western foods.

Finally, curiosity and desire for variety tend to motivate recent immigrants to try Western foods.

Relationship of Findings to the Literature

The findings of this research have several implications for the fields from which the research design emerged: food consumption research, consumer acculturation research, and innovation adoption theory.

Suggestions put forth by Prescott and Bell (1995) were supported by the findings of this study. Food consumption behavior is evidently determined not only by sensory qualities but also food prices, demographic characteristics of the consumer, cultural expectations of foods, and the willingness of consumers to experience new foods.

The willingness of Chinese Canadians to try new foods appears to be instrumental in their adoption of Western foods. There was no evidence found, however, to support the suggestion that the willingness to taste new foods is related to sensation seeking in general (Otis, 1984). Rather, the willingness of the participants of this research to try new foods appeared to be more closely associated with attitudes developed through personal experiences, family traditions, and Chinese food traditions.

The degree of consumer acculturation does seem to be positively related to the length of residence in a new country, the motivation held by immigrants, and youthfulness (Hertzler, et al., 1982; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). Those participants who appeared to have made more changes in food consumption to reflect the behaviors of Canadian society had lived here longer, had expected to make significant changes to their food consumption in Canada compared with consumption in Hong Kong, and were younger than those who were slower to change their behaviors.

The traditional acculturation model, which suggests that behavior lies on a continuum between the culture of origin and the dominant culture in the country of residence, appears to hold in this case. As acculturation occurs, it seems that food consumption behavior moves away from traditional Chinese behaviors toward Western consumption behaviors. Those who appeared to be more fully acculturated reported consuming pasta, roasted meats, convenience foods, baked goods, and dairy products more regularly than other participants who were older and had recently arrived in Canada. The latter group of consumers placed greater importance on rice, seafood and soup, three core foods in the Cantonese food traditions. It is noteworthy that, as with Penaloza's (1994) findings related to the consumer acculturation of Mexican Americans, even those consumers who exhibit Western behaviors seem to retain Chinese traditions in certain aspects of their consumption behavior. Canadian-born participants, for instance, reported eating canned soup with the addition of vegetables and Oriental noodles. All participants, regardless of age or length of time in Canada, preferred rice

over potatoes. This combination of Western and Chinese behaviors, in part, is likely attributed to the association between food consumption and social ties.

In support of Tan and Wheeler's (1983) investigation of dietary habits of Chinese families in England, Western foods consumed by the participants of this study tend to be consumed in a way which results in balance, both among the food groups and in terms of balance between food and its effect on the body. This is consistent with the traditional Chinese philosophy of maintaining balance in the body for good health.

One deviation from the traditional acculturation model which was found, was the popularity of ethnic foods which were not considered to be Chinese or Western. Many participants claimed to enjoy experimenting with various cuisines such as Thai, Indian, Greek, Italian, Mexican, Korean, and Japanese. One possible explanation for this is that, although these cuisines are not typical of North American cuisine, they are currently popular among the general Canadian public. It is also likely that these immigrants are very aware of the multicultural nature of Canadian society and are therefore interested in experiencing the foods of many cultures. The consumption of these foods may also be a means of providing variety in the diet.

Innovation theory does seem to apply to the case of immigrants encountering culturally novel foods. Ram and Sheth (1989) state that the adoption of innovations may be resisted on the basis of conflict with a consumer's product usage patterns and traditions, or a product's value or image. The findings of this research suggest that Western foods which are incompatible with Chinese food traditions are likely to be resisted. Convenience foods tend to be resisted, possibly because the idea of saving time, for some, conflicts with the cultural belief that meal preparation is a valuable activity. Sweets and dairy products are not common in traditional Chinese meals and are evidently less readily adopted than other Western foods.

Foods which appeared to involve less resistance to adoption were, as suggested by Cateora and Hess (1979), relatively compatible with Chinese traditions. An illustration of the apparent attempt to retain Chinese flavor principles is spaghetti which was cited as a commonly consumed Western food which tends to be prepared as Chinese noodles, with broth, meat and vegetables, rather than with Italian-style tomato sauce. Other commonly accepted Western foods offered other benefits such as the social ties with non-Chinese colleagues, health benefits, time-saving preparation methods, and variety.

Eleven factors were identified by this research as being key to the food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians: availability, market conditions, the degree of acculturation, food qualities, time, willingness to try, traditions, information sources, demographics, price, and the social context of the food consumption situation. Several researchers have proposed organizational frameworks for understanding food consumption behavior based on sociologic factors, household familial factors, cognitive factors, and other factors. The question then arises: Why not use these

frameworks to organize the findings of this study? The answer to this lies in the nature of the research.

The purpose of this study was to explore the food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians. A qualitative approach was chosen for many reasons and this approach permitted the topic area to be explored from the perspective of the study sample. Consequently, the factors which were identified are believed to be those which are the most relevant to the behavior of these particular consumers, as opposed to factors which were identified in work with members of other cultures and later applied to the Chinese Canadian population.

□ IMPLICATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE CANADIAN AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Implications for Food Processors and Distributors

These research findings have several implications for Canadian food marketers. First, as Chinese immigrants become integrated with Canadian society, food consumption behavior appears to shift away from traditional Chinese behaviors toward the behavior of Canadian society in general. Foods which are core to Chinese culture, such as rice and soup, are generally retained the longest as staples in the diet, while items which are less central to the traditional Chinese meal, such as Chinese-style desserts, are more easily foregone in favor of Western foods. Motivations for change include convenience, low prices, health considerations, and social acceptance. Immigrants with lifestyles which focus on these factors tend to acculturate more quickly than others; for instance, one who is employed and single places greater importance on time saving than one who is living with someone and who may share the duties of food shopping and preparation. Likewise, older immigrants may be prompted to begin consuming dairy products (which are not common among Chinese food traditions) because of heightened awareness of the potential for osteoporosis. Dairy product consumption will perhaps increase as Chinese Canadians age, as this group is generally very conscious of the relationship between diet and health.

The age or stage of the life cycle at which one immigrates also appears to be important in understanding food consumption. Those who arrive in Canada earlier in the life cycle (e.g., before marriage and child bearing) tend to adopt Western consumption behavior more readily than those who arrive later in life. It seems logical that this is because older immigrants have had many years of shopping and food preparation experience in their country of origin during which consumption behaviors were developed and practiced. Younger immigrants, on the other hand, are often shopping and preparing food for themselves for the first time in Canada. In their situation it may be just as easy to learn to cook a Western dish as it would have been to learn a Chinese dish in Hong Kong.

The implication for Canadian food marketers is that they should track the demographics of immigrants as they become part of the marketplace. In general, younger, single consumers may be expected to integrate into Canadian society more readily than older consumers, or those with families. Some of the changes which occur as integration occurs are a shift from rice-based to wheat-based products (pasta and bread), a shift from fish and seafood toward chicken and red meat (mainly because of their perceptions of price and freshness), increases in coffee intake, and increases in dairy product consumption.

Changes which occur seem to be somewhat superficial, while core traditions are retained. Although the food items which are chosen may change with integration into Canadian society, the idea of balance between various foods and their effects on the body persists even with the Canadian-

born Chinese who were interviewed for this study. Flavor principles are also retained, so although one may buy pasta instead of rice, the pasta is prepared using Chinese ingredients and cooking methods. An important tradition which was seen is the value of food preparation. Feelings of guilt tend to be associated with buying ready-made foods, and they are often modified at home. For example, additional toppings are added to frozen pizzas, extra meat and vegetables added to canned soup, and instant noodles are cooked in broth with meat and vegetables added. One of the strongest traditions is the preference for freshness.

Grocers, both Western and Chinese, should take special note of the perceived association between freshness and quick turnover. Many of the participants of this study indicated that this association affects store choice. Bread and milk, typically Western foods, are perceived to have low turnover in Chinese stores and, therefore, tend to be purchased in Western-style supermarkets. Chinese vegetables, on the other hand, have higher turnover in Chinese grocery stores and are therefore more likely purchased there. Store cleanliness was also associated with freshness.

Freshness in terms of the degree of processing is also important. Foods with preservatives, or with a long shelf life are associated with not being fresh. This is good news for local food growers because it seems that Canadian grown foods are preferred over imports for their association with freshness. Food producers should be cautioned against making foods "too produced"; not only because perceived freshness seems to decrease with processing but also because of the value placed on food preparation. Simplifying preparation is desirable, but making preparation altogether unnecessary is not. An opportunity may exist for food producers to promote their products to this group of consumers by providing suggestions for alternative methods of preparation using their products. A good example of this is the recipes which are printed on some branded soup labels to show that soup concentrate may be used as an ingredient for many dishes rather than as soup alone.

The length of time it takes for these changes to occur is an interesting consideration. The findings of this research showed a noticeable difference in the consumption behaviors of those who had been born in Canada or had lived here for more than 15 years versus those who had arrived within the last 10 years. This may suggest that acculturation is nearing completion within 20 years. Changes in the marketplace, however, may extend this period of integration because there is now such a large supply of authentic Chinese foods in Toronto. Many participants acknowledged this with the claim that almost any food which is found in Hong Kong can be found in Canada. Others said they did not expect to make any changes in food consumption when arriving in Canada because they had heard that there was an abundance of Chinese-style foods available. This situation has developed recently, only within the last 10 years; therefore, those who are arriving now may take longer to acculturate.

The acculturation process should be of interest to grocers because the perception of staple food items versus specialty foods is one change which occurs over time. Upon arrival in Canada, Chinese grocery stores are seen as the source of staple ingredients, while Western-style supermarkets

are the source of Western foods. Over time though, the store which offers the freshest, least expensive foods is chosen, regardless of its cultural style. Eventually, Chinese grocery stores may be viewed as specialty stores, and Western-style supermarkets the source of staple foods. If this observation holds, then Chinese stores may enjoy prosperity among recent immigrants, but can then expect to lose patronage to Western-style supermarkets by the time the first generation of Canadian-born Chinese begins shopping.

Restaurant patronage is another point which was explored throughout this research. It was found that fast food is generally consumed when dining alone or by younger consumers (children and young adults). Eating in Chinese restaurants on weekends is a family tradition which appears to persist regardless of the length of time in Canada. When eating with non-Chinese peers, many participants expressed an attitude of "anything goes". Table-service restaurant choices in these situations range from Western chains to ethnic restaurants. Ethnic restaurants were praised for their authenticity and their ability to provide variety in the diet. It is difficult to say whether this fondness for ethnic cuisine is a reflection of the current North American trend, or typical Chinese behavior which is characterized by variety and a willingness to try new foods.

Marketing Strategies for Food Processors and Distributors

To effectively meet the demands of the Chinese Canadian market, food processors, retailers and restaurateurs of both Western and Chinese style foods may wish to consider the strategies outlined here.

Freshness The emphasis on freshness cannot be stressed enough. Both immediate and long-term opportunities exist for Chinese-style foods grown and produced in Canada because their storage times would be shorter than for foods being transported from other countries. Further, there appears to be a very strong demand for live fish and seafood which is currently unfulfilled. The term "fresh" is used in two contexts: fresh versus frozen or canned, and fresh versus in the market or store too long.

Price Low prices are key to the choice making process of recent immigrants. This is likely influenced by the amount of free time these consumers have while they find their first jobs in Canada, limited financial resources due to moving costs, and unfamiliarity with the Canadian marketplace. Finding the lowest price, even if only by a few cents, is a challenge this group of consumers reported undertaking regularly.

Sales promotions Focus promotional efforts in print form, in an informative manner. There seems to be a distrust of television advertisements (there is an attitude that good food should not need to be advertised), while newspaper flyers are widely consulted for price checking. Promotional activities seem to be noticed only if the aim is to provide prices or awareness of a new product.

Service quality Project an image of integrity in services offered (e.g., refunds, guarantees, rainchecks) and in promotional activities. Many of the consumers interviewed for this study appeared to be skeptical of marketing practices, but were generally impressed by the service they received in Western-style supermarkets and restaurants.

Store atmosphere A clean and well-organized store atmosphere appears to be an attractive feature of Western-style supermarkets. Participants felt that some Chinese grocery stores, especially those in downtown locations, were smaller, crowded and had less parking available than large Western supermarkets. It appears that this large, clean atmosphere is alluring first as a novelty, but over time it promotes the change from Chinese stores to Western stores.

Demand for variety An overall willingness to try new foods and the value placed on variety in the diet indicate that foods from other ethnic groups are relatively likely to be tried and eventually accepted into the diets of Chinese Canadians.

Flavor principles Even though Chinese immigrants purchase Western foods they are often prepared "Chinese style". Products should be developed and marketed to be compatible with Chinese flavor principles and cooking methods. Canned chicken broth is an example of a Western product which is easily used in traditional Chinese dishes.

Convenience The time and effort required to shop for and prepare food become more important in the decision-making process as the length of time since arrival in Canada increases. A shift in favor of the popularity of easy-to-prepare dishes may therefore be anticipated in the future, thus providing an opportunity to promote products by offering a variety of preparation suggestions.

Packaging and labeling Visual cues on packaging and clear labels in stores are important, particularly to recent immigrants who are in the process of learning English and the uses of Western foods. The use of Chinese-language signs and packages could be beneficial as well, but this topic did not emerge from the findings (perhaps because the participants were required to be articulate in English).

Information sources Remember the strength of the influence of word-of-mouth communication on the acceptance of a product. Many of the participants reported sharing food consumption information and advice with family and colleagues. Such information seems to be much more credible and effective than information which originates from the food producer or distributor.

Areas for Further Research

Because this study was exploratory, with a small, non-random sample, the following suggestions for future research should be considered before applying the research findings to actual marketing situations.

A small-scale replication of this study, using a Chinese moderator, could be done to allow the focus group interviews to take place in Cantonese, expanding the sample to include those who do not speak English. By eliminating English proficiency as a criterion for participant selection, a better understanding of the overall Hong Kong Chinese population in Toronto could be achieved.

Larger-scale, quantitative studies could be devised using the findings of this research to focus the work on those factors most relevant to the food consumption behavior of the study sample. By designing a study suitable for a larger representative sample, the findings could be extrapolated to the population of Hong Kong Chinese living in Toronto, providing more reliable direction for marketing efforts than findings based on exploratory qualitative research. Extending the study of food consumption behavior of Chinese Canadians to the other popular cities of settlement for Chinese immigrants, Montreal and Vancouver, could indicate whether the factors identified by this study relate to food consumption behaviors across selected regions of Canada.

The universality of these factors could be explored by studying Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, mainland China and elsewhere. Other groups of recent immigrants to Canada which have not yet been well studied in the context of food consumption behavior are of South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Caribbean origin.

It would be interesting to determine the relative strength of influence of each of the identified factors on food consumption behavior. The identification of the strongest determinants of behavior would allow marketers to prioritize their strategies efficiently and effectively.

☐ CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the findings of this research consist of 11 factors which should be considered by members of the Canadian agri-food industry when designing their marketing activities: time, price, availability, willingness to try new foods, demographics, degree of acculturation, information sources, the social context of food consumption, food qualities, market conditions, and traditions. These factors were identified through discussions with Chinese Canadians of Hong Kong descent which allowed the information to emerge naturally from expressions of the study sample's perspectives and experiences with food consumption in Canada. Due to the nature of the methodology, these findings are not generalizable to the Chinese population in Canada as a whole; however, this report offers direction for follow-up studies and for suggested marketing strategies.

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☐ APPENDIX 1 PROFILES OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

	Age: 20-40 years	Age: 40+ years
In Canada less than 5 years	• female, in Canada 4 years, secretary, lives alone • female, in Canada 1.5 years, housewife, no kids • male, in Canada 2 years, husband of above female, part-time pharmacist • female, in Canada 2 years, marketing, lives alone • female, in Canada 11 years, nurse, lives with a Chinese roommate • male, in Canada 4 years, hotel clerk, lives alone	• female, in Canada 1 year, housewife, 18 year old son • female, in Canada 10 years, 5 kids over age 10, housewife • male, in Canada 2.5 years, retired, lives with wife • male, in Canada 2 years, works with a Thai merchant, lives with wife • female, in Canada 3 years, housewife, 2 kids • female, in Canada 6 years, housewife
In Canada more than 5 years	• female, in Canada 5 years, social worker, lives with parents and sister • female, in Canada 8 years, lives with parents and siblings, works at community center • female, in Canada 5 years, community worker, lives with husband • male, in Canada 6 years, computer programmer, lives alone • male, in Canada 7 years, multicultural tv channel, wife and baby • male, in Canada 5.5 years, works at community center, lives with wife, mother, baby and 7 year old child	• female, in Canada 25 years, works for federal government, lives with husband and two young adult kids • female, in Canada 18 years, works for Board of Education, two teenagers and husband • female, in Canada 13 years, lives alone, insurance broker • female, in Canada 7.5 years, lives alone, works at community center housing office • female, in Canada 7 years, lives with mother-in-law, husband, and two young children
Born in Canada	• male, research associate, lives alone • female, lives with French Canadian boyfriend, social worker • female, lives alone, education administrator	unable to find willing participants in this category

□ APPENDIX 2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION OUTLINE

** N.B. Questions referring to Hong Kong were omitted for the Canadian-born Chinese focus group.

Introduction

I am Lisa Neilson. I am conducting this discussion as part of the requirements for completing my Masters degree at the University of Guelph. Let me tell you how I hope this session will proceed. We will begin with you introducing yourselves to each other and to myself. We will then discuss four general topic areas related to your experiences with eating, buying, and preparing food both in Hong Kong and in Canada. This information will be used only for the purposes of my research. I am not affiliated with any commercial organizations.

I would like to tape record our discussion for my own future reference as I proceed through this research project. Do any of you object to this?

I ask that you speak one at a time to give everyone a chance to express their thoughts and opinions without interruptions.

(Ask participants to give their first names and to describe the circumstances under which they left Hong Kong, say how long ago they arrived in Canada, and to indicate the composition of their households).

Why do they shop where they do?

(explore: Chinese stores/Canadian supermarkets/markets/convenience stores/time factors/convenience/socialization agents/store atmosphere/financial factors)

1. What is your favorite store for shopping for food?
2. Where do you shop for food most often? How frequently do you shop?
3. Under what circumstances do you shop in other places? (including convenience stores)
4. What do you like/dislike about these stores?
5. Describe your first experiences with shopping for food in Canada.

Why do they buy what they do?

(explore: familiarity with Western foods/influences of Canadian and Chinese media, family, peers, church, school/preferences and aversions/preparation/national vs. private labels/staples vs. prepared foods/preservation- dried, frozen, canned, pickled, salted)

Next I will ask you to discuss topics related to "Western" foods. What I mean by this term is foods which have traditionally been consumed in Europe and in North America, using ingredients and preparation techniques which are typically European and North American.

1. What Western foods or dishes did you used to eat in Hong Kong?
2. What Western foods do you like to eat here in Canada?
   Describe some of your first experiences with eating Western foods in Canada. Under what circumstances did you eat these foods for the first time?
3. Give some examples of dishes you prepare using Western foods.
4. In what situations do you eat Western foods? Chinese foods?

5. Discuss foods which are typically consumed for breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, desserts in your household.
6. Discuss perceptions and uses of various forms of food; dried, frozen, canned, pickled, salted, prepared foods.
7. What sources of information do you utilize for food purchases? media, friends, school, etc.
8. What are your favorite Western foods?

How do they perceive Canadian food?

1. Before you left Hong Kong, what were your impressions of foods which are eaten by Canadians?
2. How would you describe the food in Canada to someone still living in Hong Kong?
3. What do you like the most about food in Canada? What do you dislike the most?

How does culture influence their food consumption behavior?

(explore: at home vs away from home/acculturation effects/generational differences/effect of religion)

1. What is your favorite place to eat out?
2. Under what circumstances do you eat away from home?
3. How do your dining experiences away from home differ from those at home?
4. In what ways have you and your family members changed your eating and shopping practices since arriving in Canada?
5. What practices have you maintained?
6. How do your eating and shopping practices differ from others in your family?
7. What do you miss the most about eating and buying food in Hong Kong?
8. Who or what do you believe has had the greatest influence on your eating practices and food buying practices in Canada?
9. Do you hold any beliefs that you feel are particularly influential on your food practices?

☐ APPENDIX 3 PRETEST STAGE

Pretest Focus Group 1

Saturday, November 12, 1994
12:15-1:40 PM
FACS Lounge, University of Guelph

Participants were recruited from the University of Guelph's Central Students' Association Chinese Christian Fellowship Club

Five students of Hong Kong descent:
- 1 female born in Canada
- 1 female arrived in Canada 1 year ago
- 1 male arrived in Canada 1 year ago
- 1 male arrived in Canada 6 years ago
- 1 male arrived in Canada 5 years ago

Outcome:

1. Changes were made in the focus group schedule to ensure that all topic areas were covered. Some of the questions which were used in this focus group discussion were too vague to stimulate conversation in every area.

2. Having participants who represent various lengths of time since arrival in Canada was useful. Those who had been here longer were able to help to translate difficult terms. As well, the participant who was Canadian-born was more outgoing than the others and stimulated conversation in areas which had not been mentioned by the others.

3. Positive aspects of Canadian food and Canadian supermarkets were more readily discussed than negative aspects. Caution must be taken to acknowledge the "willingness to please" which may be the underlying cause of the praise of Canadian foods and supermarkets. Again, the Canadian-born participant was helpful in initiating comments regarding the negative aspects of Canadian foods and stores, prompting agreement from the others.

4. Those who had lived in Canada for only 1 year participated in the discussion less often than those who had been here longer. Perhaps changing the criteria for recruiting participants to include only those who have been here a minimum of 5 years should be considered. Another option might be to use a "buddy system" in which participants who have been here 5 years or more bring a friend or acquaintance who is a more recent immigrant with them to the interview. This could make the recent immigrants feel more comfortable in the focus group, thus stimulating more discussion.

Pretest Focus Group 2

Thursday, November 24, 1994
5:15-6:25 PM
Library study room, University of Guelph

Participants were recruited from the University of Guelph's Central Students' Association Chinese Students Society (90 members).

Eleven people present, four joined us after we'd had introductions and had begun the discussion. This was a monthly meeting of the CSS executive.

Outcome:

1. Smaller groups may be more productive and easier to work with. With this group only 5 or 6 really participated; the others did not contribute to the discussion, even when I asked them their opinions directly. At times there were two or three conversations taking place at once, which was difficult to control.

2. These participants were close friends who had known each other for several years. Sometimes this was good in that they were quite open and the discussion was insightful, but it also provided an atmosphere for going off topic and for interrupting other participants.

3. There was evidence that Chinese males do not participate often in food preparation and food shopping. It is very important to screen carefully to include only participants who participate in food shopping and preparation.

4. The lack of a clear definition of Canadian foods is confusing to all parties involved in the study. A working definition of Canadian foods must be stated at the outset of the discussion.

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NB Bil. Bor	PROFIL a										
RÉSULTAT	---		BBB	BBC	BCC	CBC	CCB	CCC	PPB	PPC	Total
	81	7	28	2		1		2			121
B			2								2
C	1		3								4
E			1							1	2
AAA	1										1
AAX	1										1
ABA	3	1	1								5
ABB			1								1
ABX			1								1
AX	1										1
BA	1										1
BAA	1		3								4
BAC			1								1
BB			2								2
BBA	3		3					1			7
BBB	3		5					2			10
BBC		1	4							1	6
BBE			2								2
BCB			1								1
BCC			4								4
BCE			2					1			3
CBA			1								1
CBB	2		20			1					23
CBC			3			3					6
CBE		1									1
CCB	1	1	11								13
CCC			7		1	1		4			13
CCE			8					2			10
CEB								1			1
CEE		3	3	1				1			8
E E			1					1			2
EAB	1										1
EBA	1		1								2
EBB	1		10				1	2			14
EBC	1		4			1					6
ECA			1								1
ECB	3		18								21
ECC	2		4	1		2		2		1	12
ECE			11			3	1	3			18
EEB			3								3
EEC	2		1			4		2	1		10
EEE	1	1	24	1		10		15		1	53
XBB			1								1
Total	111	15	196	5	1	26	2	39	1	4	400